

THE INDYPENDENT

Issue #128, NOVEMBER 13 – DECEMBER 10, 2008
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE

SPARE CHANGE?

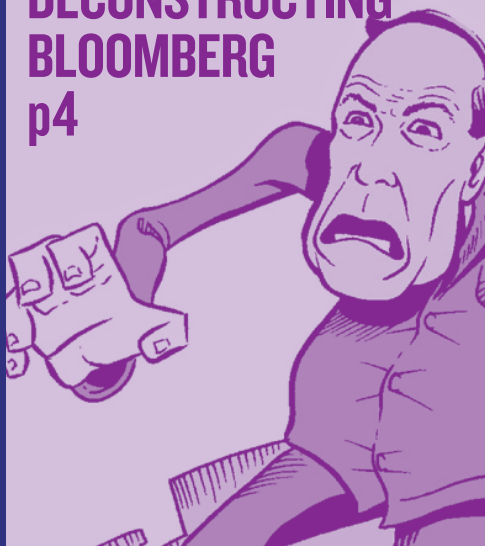
Post-election
coverage
starts page 6

ILLUSTRATION BY
RUSTY ZIMMERMAN

THE COST OF
SURVIVING IN
THE GAZA STRIP
p12



DECONSTRUCTING
BLOOMBERG
p4



THE MACKTIVIST,
p15



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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their time and energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Independent Press Association awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging citizens to produce their own media. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. Volunteers write and edit articles, take photographs, do design work and illustrations, help distribute papers, update the website and more! *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other projects, the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the IndyVideo news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org). NYC IMC relies on volunteer participation and is open to anyone who is interested.

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community calendar

The next open editorial meetings for *The Indypendent* are Tuesday, Nov. 18 at 7pm. 4 W 43rd St, Room 311. All are welcome. Please send event announcements to indyevents@gmail.com

MON NOV 17

7:30-9:30pm • \$5 Donation
DISCUSSION: "IS CAPITALISM COMING APART? ELECTION SEASON TUMULT AND OPPORTUNITIES"
Can the world financial crisis be solved by electing the right people? Join the Freedom Socialist Party in discussing the presidential election results in the context of the history of vote suppression. Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St (btwn Malcolm X/Lenox & 7th Aves) 212-222-0633 • fsp@nyc.net

WED NOV 19

7pm • Donations appreciated
READING/DISCUSSION: "SEX IN CRISIS: HOW THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IS TRYING TO RUIN SEX FOR EVERYONE"
Author Dagmar Herzog will read from his new book, *Sex in Crisis: The New Sexual Revolution and the Future of American Politics*, and holding a discussion about it afterwards. Revolution Books, 146 W 26th St (btwn 6th & 7th Aves) 212-691-3345 • revolutionbooksnyc.org

SAT NOV 22

7pm • \$30
PERFORMANCE: "EXIT CUCKOO"
Lisa Ramirez is the star of this autobiographical one-woman play chronicling her experiences as a Manhattan nanny. All proceeds from this performance will go to Domestic Workers United. Reservations are required, and there will be a party following the performance. Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq S (btwn Thompson & Sullivan) 718-220-7391 x23 • exitcuckoo4dwwu@gmail.com

4:30pm • FREE
EVENT: STOLEN LIVES INDUCTION CEREMONY
The Stolen Lives Induction Ceremony formally inducts victims of police killings into the roster of the Stolen Lives Project. It brings together family members to a space in which the humanity of their

loved ones lost at the hands of the police is acknowledged in contrast to the demonization by the powers-that-be. The Gallery of John H. Holmes Community House of the Community Church of New York, 28 E 35th St (btwn Park & Madison Aves) oct22ny@yahoo.com

11am-3pm • FREE
EVENT: SINGLE-PAYER TEACH-IN
Join a NYC-wide teach-in on high profile strategies to build a united front of sustained political action that creates a national single-payer healthcare system in the U.S. 212-865-6027 • phimg.org

TUE NOV 25-WED NOV 26

4pm (Rally)-7am (Sleep-out) • FREE
EVENT: SLEEP-OUT PROTEST
Two days before Thanksgiving, Picture the Homeless will be holding a sleep-out protest on the streets of Harlem. The message to send to elected officials is clear: Housing is a human right, every day and every night! Harlem State Office Building, 163 W 125th St (at Adam Clayton Powell Blvd) 646-314-6423 • sam@picturethehomeless.org

WED DEC 3

7:30 • FREE
BOOK PARTY/FORUM: "THE RADICAL JACK LONDON: WRITINGS ON WAR AND REVOLUTION"
Author Jonah Raskin discusses the authentic Jack London, writer-adventurer-ardent socialist. Brecht Forum, 451 West Ave. brechtforum.org

FRI DEC 5

8pm • \$10/\$6 kids
PERFORMANCE: FRICTION FARM AND BEV GRANT & THE DISSIDENT DAUGHTERS
Bev Grant & the Dissident Daughters offer an eclectic mix of songs of social justice with a distinct woman's point of view. Friction Farm are folk musicians who find inspiration in the ordinary. Good Coffehouse Music Parlor, 53 Prospect Park West, Bklyn 718-768-2972 • gchmusic.org

reader comments

JUST LIKE US

Responses to "Dreams from My Mother," Oct. 27:

I can only imagine little kids reading their history books and seeing one line, Barack Hussin Obama, first African-American president. I hope his autobiography is required reading. —F.E. DUNCAN

Good to know that Obama is human like everyone else. Guess that means he's not gonna change anything either. Things never change from above and hopefully people will learn that Obama is the perfect example of that. —JARED

MORE CHOICES, PLEASE

Response to "Third Party—An Alternative Vote," Oct. 27:

Thank you for presenting the "other" choices. A "wasted vote" is one cast to a representative that

does not represent us, not one that loses. More choices give us more of a chance to be represented in the selection.

—PUCCOLO

NO DIRECTION HOME

Response to "Galveston Pushes Gentrification by Hurricane," Oct. 27:

I feel like it is wrong to keep a man away from his home when all he wants to do is check on things and make sure his place is still secure. If the city would have allowed its residents back in right away, many items could have been washed and salvaged, houses could have been opened up to air out and begin drying instead of containing the quick-growing mold. Damage would have been done just the same, but there would have been much more salvaged. —J.P. SMITH, GALVESTON, Tx.



NOV. 27:

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING: People from around the Northeast will gather on Cole's Hill in Plymouth, Mass. at noon on Thursday, Nov. 27 to mark the 39th annual "Day of Mourning," i.e., Thanksgiving. A New York bus will leave in the morning and return later that night. For more information, call the International Action Center at 212-633-6646. ABOVE: A statue of Chief Massasoit overlooks Plymouth. Massasoit was the Wampanoag Indian chief who welcomed the Pilgrims in 1621. PHOTO: DIKIMAGES.COM

SAT DEC 6

10am-4pm • FREE
RECYCLE: COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONICS.
Drop off your old television sets, printers, laptops, radios, cell phones, disks, wires and computers. Sponsored by the Lower East Side Ecology Center. PS 321, 7th Ave (btwn 1st & 2nd St) • lesecologycenter.org

SUN DEC 7

11am-1pm • FREE
EVENT: CHILDREN'S VIGIL FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Call upon New York City councilmembers and local elected officials to take a stand in support of labor standards for New York's 200,000 domestic workers. This critical workforce supports New York families as caregivers and housekeepers, yet works without a safety net, living wages or basic labor standards. City Hall, 260 Broadway (at Park Place) 718-220-7391 x23 or x11 • domestic-workersunited@gmail.com

Next Issue: December 11.

WAR OF WORDS

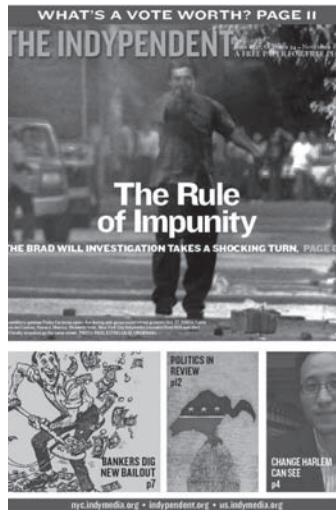
Response to "'Obscene Monument to War' Returns to NYC," Oct. 27:

I find it to be shabby journalism when Mr. Stoner did not even seek comment from the Intrepid Museum leadership when writing such a one-sided, bullshit piece on 12 people protesting the return of the Intrepid. —BILL WHITE, PRESIDENT OF THE INTREPID FOUNDATION

Author's Reply:

I wonder if Mr. White would call every single other article written about the Intrepid "shabby journalism" because none mentioned the other side of the story — that there were protesters there, and that there are folks upset about the ahistorical (and pro-war) nature of the museum's exhibits. My guess is that he would not. —ERIC STONER

CORRECTION: Due to an editor's error, the New York City Economic Development Corporation was misidentified as the Empire State Development Corporation in an article ("City Carves Up E. 125th St. for Developers") that appeared in the October 24 issue of *The Indypendent*.



The Fight for “Real Rent Reform” Begins

DEMOCRATS WIN MAJORITY IN STATE SENATE — WILL IT CLEAR THE WAY FOR PRO-TENANT BILLS?

By KENNY SCHAEFFER

After nearly 50 years of Republican control of the New York State Senate, Democrats and the Working Families Party unseated two long-term incumbents to gain a 32-30 majority on Nov. 4. This should pave the way for long-overdue legislation to address New York City’s housing crisis that tenants’ groups have been working on for years.

At separate election-night victory parties at a downtown bar and the Sheraton Hotel, WFP Director Danny Cantor and Deputy Director Bill Lipton both declared that the first fight under the new regime in Albany “will be over rent regulation.”

The top priority for the tenant movement and affordable-housing advocates is a package of bills called the “Real Rent Reform” agenda. These include repealing vacancy decontrol for the city’s one million rent-stabilized apartments; extending protections to the tens of thousands of tenants whose apartments have been taken out of the Mitchell-Lama and Section 8 programs; reforming the New York City Rent Guidelines Board; and restoring the city’s home rule over rent laws by repealing the 1971 Urstadt Law. Another goal will be restoring rent controls to units that have been deregulated.

Tenants have long awaited an end to the Republican control of the senate. Under former Gov. George Pataki and Majority Leader Joseph Bruno (who retired last June amid a federal corruption probe), the state significantly weakened rent and eviction protections in 1997 and in 2003. The Assembly passed several bills related to the Real Rent Reform agenda in May, but Bruno blocked them.

The Democrats took the Senate for the first time since 1965 by winning seats on Long Island and in Queens. In the 15th District (Glendale-Middle Village), pro-tenant City Councilmember Joe Addabbo Jr. won 57 percent of the vote to defeat nine-term incumbent Serphin Maltese. This race was the top priority for many concerned with

recapturing the senate. The Tenants Political Action Committee, labor unions, the National Abortion Rights Action League, Citizens’ Union, Planned Parenthood and the League of Conservation Voters blanketed the district with volunteers.

In Suffolk County, Brookhaven Town Supervisor Brian Foley won a 17-point victory over 36-year Republican incumbent Caesar Trunzo, the assistant majority leader.

In other key races, Democrats Craig Johnson in Nassau County and Darrell Aubertine of the Oswego-Watertown area upstate, who both narrowly won their seats

counted, he led City Councilmember James Gennaro by less than 750 votes.

Democratic plans were temporarily disrupted when a group of four senators — Carl Kruger of Brooklyn, Pedro Espada Jr. and Ruben Diaz Sr. of the Bronx and the newly elected Hiram Monserrate of Queens — threatened not to back fellow Democrat Malcolm Smith of Queens for the post of new majority leader in January.

Some observers suspect that Espada has taken contributions from the Rent Stabilization Association (RSA) a landlord lobbying group that has been openly offering large

be crumbling. Monserrate endorsed Smith on Nov. 8. And party-switching could be politically dangerous: Olga Mendez joined the GOP in 2002 after 24 years in the Senate as a Democrat, but lost her re-election bid in 2004 as a Republican. (Mendez, who represented the East Harlem/South Bronx district, claimed that Democrats hadn’t done enough for Latinos and that she would have more clout as a member of the majority. But when she got a bill to raise the minimum wage through the senate, Pataki vetoed it.)

The long-anticipated elevation of Malcolm Smith to majority leader will not make progress on housing issues automatic. Smith has sent mixed messages about his intentions. He has stated his support for repeal of vacancy decontrol and other measures, but declined an invitation when Met Council and other tenant-rights advocates traveled to Albany last May to witness the passage of pro-tenant bills by the Assembly. Soon afterward, RSA head Joseph Strasburg told the *New York Observer* that Smith was “attempting to be the voice of reason” to avoid jeopardizing contributions from real-estate interests.

On Nov. 7, Smith announced that he had chosen Angelo Aponte to head his transition team and possibly become his chief of staff. As state housing commissioner under former Gov. Mario Cuomo, Aponte was no friend to tenants, stating that he did not believe in rent regulations.

All of this means that the end of Republican control of the state senate is only the beginning. But with the Working Families Party and other allies, such as the unions participating in the Real Rent Reform and Housing Here and Now coalitions, the prospects for stronger rent and eviction protections are definitely brighter.

This article originally appeared in Tenant/Inquilino, the newspaper of the Metropolitan Council on Housing, www.met-council.net.



THIRD MAN IN THE ROOM?: Tenant groups have high hopes as the Democrats and Malcom Smith (D-Queens, left) look to take charge of the New York State Senate in January. However, a breakaway faction of Democratic state senators — including Ruben Diaz Sr. (center) of the Bronx and Carl Kruger (right) of Brooklyn — are threatening to ally themselves with the Republicans. PHOTOS: NYSENATE.COM

in special elections, were re-elected for full terms. Incumbents Andrea-Stewart Cousins of Yonkers, Suzi Oppenheimer of Westchester, and Toby Ann Stavisky of Queens also defeated Republican challengers well financed with real-estate money. But the other Queens Republican targeted by tenant groups, Frank Padavan of the 11th District (Bayside-Queens Village), appeared to have held his seat. With absentee ballots not yet

contributions to any politician who would accept them. But this is not possible to verify as Espada has not filed required campaign contribution reports and is being sued by the Board of Elections to do so.

Monserrate, on the other hand, has long been close to the Working Families Party and claimed to be acting only to increase the representation of Latinos in leadership positions.

At press time, the mini-revolt seemed to



Gay & Straight Against Prop 8

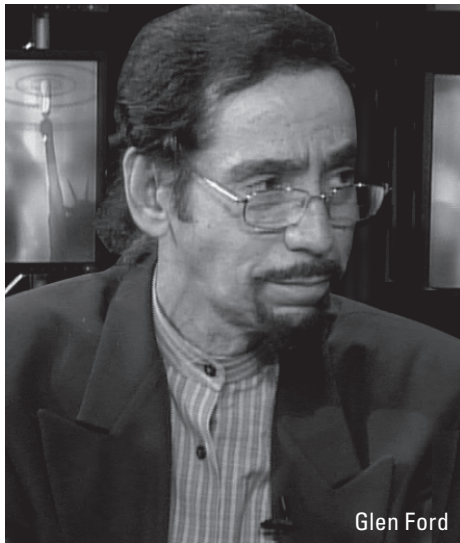
Thousands of supporters of gay marriage demonstrated outside the Mormon Temple at 65th St. and Columbus Ave. on Nov. 12. The Mormon Church poured tens of millions of dollars into the campaign to pass California’s Proposition 8, which formally banned gays from being able to marry in the nation’s largest state.

PHOTO: ALEX NATHANSON

From the White House to Your House

CHANGE NEEDED IN NEW YORK CITY INTERVIEWS BY JAISAL NOOR

The *Independent's* Jaisal Noor sat down with two veteran progressive journalists to discuss the impact of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg's plan to run for a third term, what might be expected from the administration of President-elect Barack Obama and the role of community-based, grassroots organizing.



INTERVIEW WITH GLEN FORD,
executive editor of Black Agenda Report.

Jaisal Noor: What are the stakes now that Barack Obama has been elected president?

Glen Ford: The September [economic] meltdown was not just an ordinary occurrence, not just part of the boom-and-bust cycle of capitalism. It resulted in the capitalist system as it operates economically and in terms of power, being grievously wounded — some of their institutions put out of business. What the project is now — the ongoing project — is to restructure the way the United States develops. It's that fundamental.

JN: Will there be a smooth transition from a Bush administration — which was dominated by corporations — to an Obama administration that is dominated by corporations? Every sign says so.

[Now that] Barack Obama is president elect, [we are] in the transition period. These months of transition will see the redistribution of several trillion dollars by Jan. 20; the changes that have been instituted will be irreversible.

Therefore it is incumbent upon progressives not to wait until Jan. 20, but to start agitating right now with President-elect Obama, who can effect some alteration of that scheme as president-elect.

JN: A lot of people are excited about the 2008 election, but will there be a huge let-down by the time the 2009 New York City election comes around for the mayor and the City Council. What's your message to people involved in politics or who have become involved in politics for the first time?

GF: The meltdown had extremely intense effects in New York City, which is the home of these same investment banks. They in conjunction with billionaire mayor [Michael Bloomberg] — created little power centers through their philanthropy. They created power centers in Harlem, and in other areas of the city, to smooth the way for the

gentrification of these neighborhoods. At this juncture, the bought-off politicians in Harlem and in other neighborhoods in the city don't have a sugar-daddy anymore. They are exposed. If Bloomberg is elected to a third term he has the wealth to fill this void, which makes it even more crucial to defeat him.

JN: Now we even have more to lose, because it is taxpayer money that's going to invested in these gentrification projects.

GF: In fact what has occurred is that the investment banks have stuck their trunks into the wealth of the country in order to resurrect themselves after this great debacle. They can no longer fulfill the mission that has historically been assigned to them ... which is to decide which sectors of the economy, which neighborhoods of the city will be developed — which populations will stay and which ones will leave.

All of those were private decisions often facilitated by corporate influence in government, but not based upon what the needs of the people in the city are. It's time for activists to rise up and demand a people's plan — plans that put the people's money in service of the people — to anchor the currently existing population in place. This is the challenge to activists — to actually have a plan for development that they can use as a counter to corporate plans or to Bloomberg's plans that serve the corporations.

For more, go to blackagenda.com.

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INTERVIEW WITH JUAN GONZALEZ,
columnist with the New York Daily News and Democracy Now! co-host. Three years ago he authored *Where Have All The Fighters Gone? An Analysis of New York City Mayoral Race of 2005*.

Jaisal Noor: Can you give a historical context for the Bloomberg administration?

Juan Gonzalez: What I think this is part of is a vast re-engineering of the American city that has been going on for the last 30 years.

In the early 1960s and into the 1970s, corporate America had a problem. The central cities were becoming increasingly Black, Hispanic and poor, but the cities were the fulcrum of all economic activity in America. They were the banking centers, industrial centers, and the riots and rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s made clear to America's corporate elite that they were losing control of the cities. It was also reflected in the 1970s by the increasing election of Black and Latino officials to city councils and mayoralties throughout America. So

the corporate elite realized that they were not only losing social control, they were losing political control. So you had then the beginning of a whole process to try to reclaim the cities.

Gradually, political leaders reached a conclusion that there were other ways to spatially de-concentrate or gentrify the cities through the use of land policies and tax policies. So tax policies were adopted that in essence gave preferences to developers that built certain types of housing.

JN: What would be the consequences of a third term for the Bloomberg administration?

JG: Bloomberg has engineered what I call a velvet coup in New York City politics. He has, in essence, increasingly reduced the powers of other elected officials and of city government in general and replaced it with administrative or executive power which is concentrated in the hands of the mayor, especially when it comes to what to me is the most important issue in any city — in modern times — land policy.

The Bloomberg administration has been involved in a massive rezoning of the New York City neighborhoods, usually upscale rezoning. It has attempted in more well-to-do, powerful neighborhoods to down-zone, in essence protecting those wealthy neighborhoods from further development or over-development. But in poor neighborhoods and working-class areas of the city and the central city core it has been up-zoning all of these neighborhoods.

The other thing that it [the administration] has done is that it has moved land out of the control of city government and into the control of the New York City Economic Development Corporation. This is land technically owned by the IDA [New York City Industrial Development Agency] or EDC [New York City Economic Development Corporation], therefore off the tax rolls. Then the IDA or EDC create special deals with private developers, where developers can develop land that is technically publicly owned, but is in reality privately operated.

JN: One of the most important points in your piece three years ago was your criticism of the progressive movement. You wrote how it is divided on ethnic and class lines, and there is a disconnect between the middle-class progressive movement and the realities of urban America. Where do you think the movement stands today?

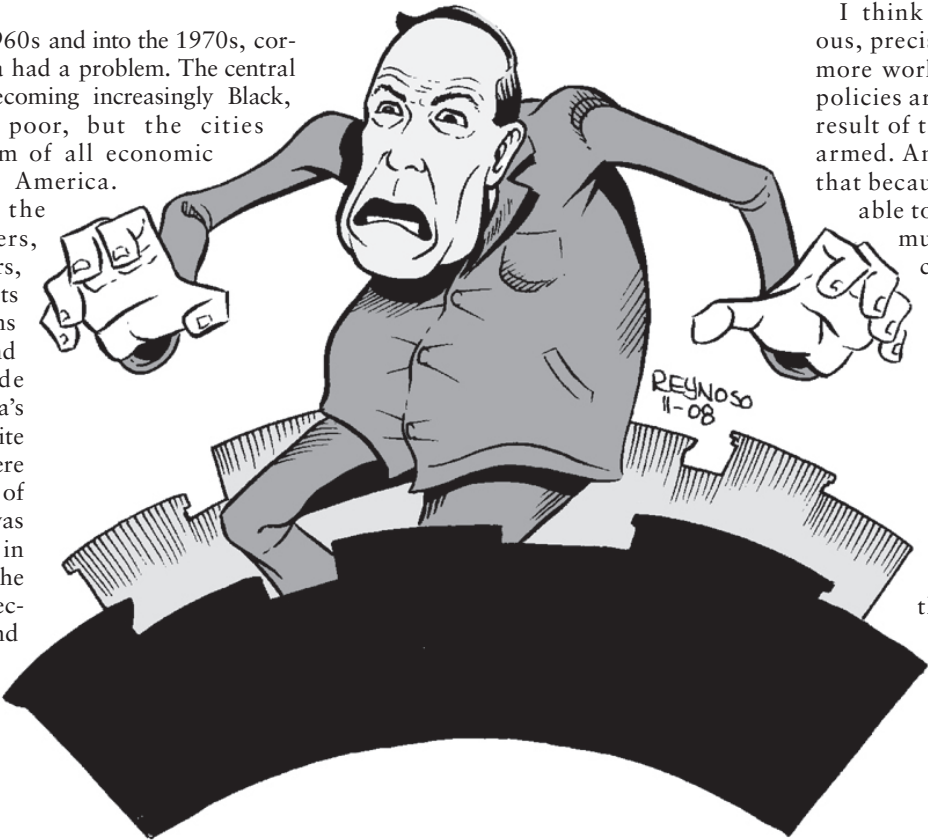
JG: I think the progressive movement is still much more interested in international af-

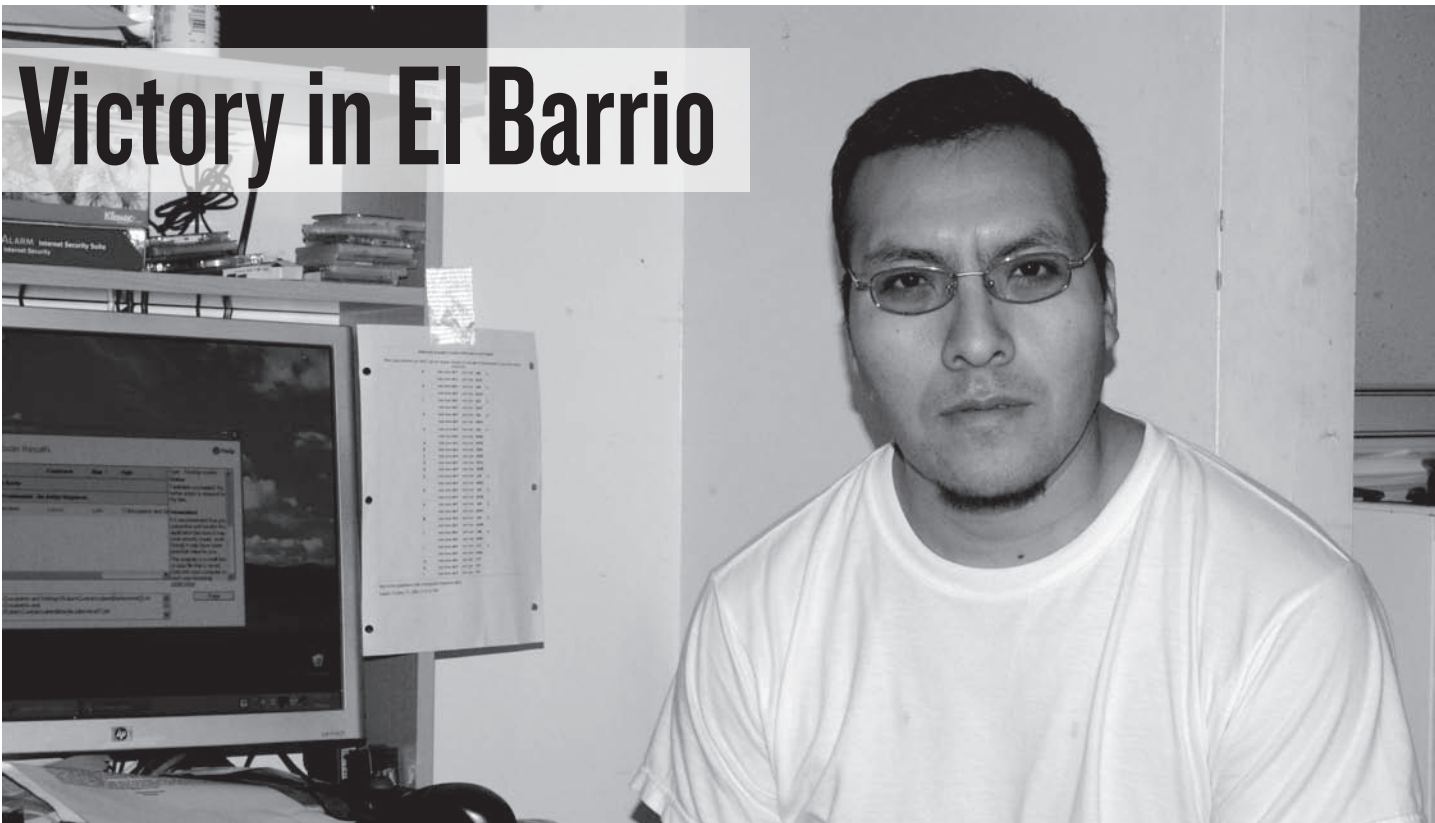


fairs ... than it is in what's going on right here, in the neighborhoods of the city. Part of it is that most progressives are middle class and are not that connected to everyday situations that occur in the city. And also the fact is that someone like Bloomberg can be confusing to progressives, because on many social issues he is relatively moderate. He seems to maintain a veneer of progressive thinking or enlightened ideas, and he's generally not a belligerent man himself in his dealings with community leaders and other political rivals. So as a result of that, they are lulled into thinking, especially after eight years of [former Mayor Rudolph] Guiliani, that Bloomberg is a breath of fresh air.

I think he is actually more dangerous, precisely because it takes a little bit more work to analyze how it is that his policies are reactionary. And I think as a result of that many progressives are disarmed. And you have the other problem, that because he has so much money, he is able to provide grants to lots of community organizations and those community organizations then in essence have a conflict in being able to adequately critique the mayor because they are receiving funding from the mayor. Bloomberg is one of those rare politicians that ... can't be bought — he does the buying. He has enough money to carry out this enormous social bribery with community leaders and nonprofits throughout the city.

To listen to the entire interview, go to independent.org.





BY JENNIFER JANISCH

The global economic crisis that has shaken the real-estate industry has one tenant organization in East Harlem celebrating victory over a British landlord.

After nearly two years of community organizing, demonstrations, an innovative lawsuit and international campaigning, Movement for Justice in El Barrio (MJB) — an East Harlem collective of mostly Mexican immigrants — is calling its battle with failed financial-services firm Dawnay, Day “a triumph of David and Goliath proportions.”

Dawnay, Day purchased 47 buildings in the neighborhood for a quarter of a billion dollars in March 2007. It was the British firm’s only foray into the U.S. real-estate market, following the lead of several large property firms that over-leveraged their investments in New York City residential buildings over the last couple of years and are now paying the price.

The London-based company, which manages more than \$10 billion in assets worldwide, has become one of Europe’s most high-profile casualties of the international financial crisis. It is now under the administration of accounting firm BDO Stoy Hayward and the real-estate advisor DTZ, which are charged with restructuring the company and selling its property holdings.

Neither BDO Stoy Hayward nor DTZ would comment on the status of the transactions. But according to PropertyWeek.com, final bids were submitted November 7 by Threadneedle, F&C REIT Asset Management, Criterion Capital and Exemplar. Two unknown U.S.-based cash buyers are submitting bids as well.

‘INSPIRED BY TENANTS’

Organizing in the buildings began more than five years ago, when they were owned by Steven Kessner, who was once named one of New York’s ten worst landlords by the *Village Voice*. Originally, about 15 tenants met in the lobbies of their buildings to discuss ways to confront Kessner and get him to make repairs. They expanded their initiative to his other buildings.

Since they had little experience organizing, the tenants turned to Juan Haro, who once worked organizing restaurant workers, to help them develop a strategy.

“I was inspired by these tenants who wanted to initiate something and really just didn’t know how,” says Haro, the coordinator of MJB. “A lot of people have this stereotype that immigrants live in fear and don’t want to take on such a battle, but we found the opposite: tenants were fed up with the conditions

they were living in and ready to take action.”

After MJB held protests to draw attention to Kessner’s negligent management practices in East Harlem, he sold his 47 buildings to Dawnay, Day. MJB decided to put the British financial firm on notice.

“We held a press conference warning Dawnay, Day, saying ‘Welcome to El Barrio. We will not be moved, we are here to stay,’” says Haro. “You may not know this, but you bought buildings where tenants are organized.”

Dawnay, Day representatives clearly stated their intentions to the British press.

“East Harlem is the last area of the whole of Manhattan being gentrified. Our intention is to build up,” Phil Blakeley, leader of the firm’s U.S. expansion, told the *London Times*. “We are not just looking at New York — that is just a start. Our aim is to have in excess of \$5 billion within a short period — within a few years.”

Blakeley added that he was attracted by the opportunity to raise rents on vacant apartments. “With renovation, a flat could well take \$1,700 a month once re-let on the open market,” he said, adding that long-term tenants could be bought out.

“They were planning to take advantage of New York’s lax rent laws,” Haro says.

RATS AND ROACHES

According to some tenants, the negligent maintenance continued under Dawnay, Day’s management. (The British firm could not be reached for comment.)

Andres Hernandez lives with his family in a Dawnay, Day building on East 117th Street. He gestures toward a gaping hole in his kitchen wall, near the stove. He says the superintendent replaced the apartment’s small boiler with

an electric heater months ago, but has not yet sealed the wall shut.

“People in the building say they want to force all the Hispanics out and fill the building with white people,” he says.

Carolina Ortega has lived with her father and her children on East 116th Street for decades. She says Dawnay, Day has tried to force them out by ignoring their pleas for extermination of the rats and roaches that infest their apartment.

“They do things for the new tenants, but not for us,” she says. “We’ve taken them to court two or three times, but we haven’t said anything lately because my father doesn’t want to fight it anymore.”

MJB has filed a lawsuit against Dawnay, Day, claiming the company violated consumer-protection laws by using deceptive business practices. Despite the company’s financial turmoil, MJB says it does not plan to drop the suit.

MJB’s attorney, Ed Josephson, recently filed a motion to obtain Dawnay, Day’s financial records. He says the company was slapping tenants with suspicious bills, citing charges they did not owe.

“They invent phantom charges to make us leave here,” says Filiberto Hernandez, a mechanic who lives in a Dawnay, Day building on East 106th Street and is an MJB member. “They say the rent arrives late and they overcharge us.”

Tenants say the company offered them buyouts of \$10,000 to vacate their apartments. They have also reported that Dawnay, Day charged them for ordinary maintenance and for washers and dryers that they do not have.

UNMOVEABLE: British landlord Dawnay, Day hoped to force rent-stabilized tenants like Filiberto Hernandez (Left) out of the 47 apartment buildings it purchased in East Harlem in 2007. However, Dawnay, Day’s plans went up in smoke after the global financial crisis struck the over-leveraged company. [It] is a powerful, rich company, and it has fallen as a victim of its own devices,” Hernandez says. PHOTO: JAMIE LEHANE

THE HARDER THEY FALL

Dawnay, Day isn’t the only private-equity company that over-leveraged its investments in rent-stabilized apartment buildings. A recent report by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD) states that from 2006 to 2007, projected income — not actual income — was used to justify inflated loan amounts for an estimated 90,000 units of affordable rental housing in New York City.

Perhaps the most notable example was Tishman Speyer’s purchase of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village from MetLife. The firm bought the 80-acre, 11,200-unit complex of mostly rent-stabilized apartments for a record-breaking \$5.4 billion in 2006. In late September, Standard and Poor’s downgraded ratings on 22 classes of mortgage-backed securities related to these properties. It estimates that the complex is now worth 10 percent less.

In Harlem, Riverton Houses and Savoy Park are on the verge of default as well. Their new owners failed to meet their projections that they could double or triple their income by bringing rents up to market rate. According to the ANHD report, which cites SEC “Free Writing Prospectus” filings, Savoy Park’s landlord had anticipated increasing its net operating income (NOI) from \$7.4 million to \$19 million over a five-year period. The owner of Riverton Houses believed it would increase its NOI from \$5.2 million to \$23.6 million in the same timeframe.

Although investors claimed they could turn over the rent-stabilized apartments at a rate of 20 to 30 percent each year, the reality is that tenants won’t move out voluntarily at that rate, as they know they can’t find equivalent affordable housing. The average annual turnover rate is 3 to 5 percent, making the quick profits these firms envisioned next to impossible without employing high-pressure eviction tactics.

ANHD deputy director Benjamin Dulchin says that despite tighter access to credit and the bursting of the national housing bubble, he doesn’t see a transformation yet. “I think these investments will slow, but firms will continue to argue that these assets are undervalued,” he says. “They’ll say ‘if only we can get rid of these pesky rent-stabilized tenants, we can reap a large profit.’”

Haro says it’s unlikely the tenants will have a cordial relationship with another big financial firm.

“We’re more ready than we were before Dawnay, Day bought these buildings,” he says. “The tenants know their rights and are ready to fight.”

Members of MJB were poised to travel to London to confront Dawnay, Day when they heard the news that the firm was collapsing and had to sell its property holdings. They recently held a march in East Harlem to celebrate their victory.

Hernandez says the Dawnay, Day tenants aren’t fearful of the future.

“We are very happy,” he says. “We feel it is a great success for us. [Dawnay, Day] is a powerful, rich company, and it has fallen as a victim of its own devices.

“We are a people that is fighting for the right to live with dignity.”

Dawnay, Day vs. East Harlem

Dawnay, Day spent close to \$250 million in March 2007 on 47 buildings north and east of Central Park from East 100th to East 120th streets, containing 1,137 apartments and 55 commercial spaces. East Harlem, called El Barrio by many of its 100,000 residents, is a historically Puerto Rican neighborhood that has recently experienced a large influx of Mexican, Chinese and Arab immigrants. Nearly 40 percent of its residents live below the poverty line. The median household income in 2005 was only \$23,000 per year, less than half of the \$50,000 figure for all of Manhattan. The median rent was \$900 a month — 47 percent of the median income.



The Independent, Nov. 16, 2007



DREAMING OUT LOUD: A woman watching election night returns in Harlem is overcome with joy when she learns Barack Obama will be the next president. PHOTO: JOEL COOK

Future Perfect

By NICHOLAS POWERS

YES WE CAN,” we sang, our voices like a flag blowing through the street. We raised our chant to the sky as men with drums hammered out rhythms. And we danced our victory dance. Faces blurred into faces. Eyes reflected the same brilliance. Hands touched hands. A man pulled me into the circle where we writhed like human flames. Heat, unrelenting heat carried us into a vortex of time. We sang sounds older than words. We felt history older than memory, some original human need that could not be named blasted through us. When we used words again it was the chant “YES WE CAN!”

Dizzy, I staggered out of the circle and stood on 125th Street. Obama supporters flowed around me like a river. Arms on shoulders, they smiled, laughed and raised their hands and yelled. Every color, shape and shade of humanity moved in the same direction. Rainbow America, more colored than not, was not supposed to arrive until 2042, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. But here we were, dancing in the street.

I spread my arms out wide as if to hold the people and this moment forever. “This is who we really are,” I shouted. And when we are not ourselves, I thought, it’s because to survive we internalize a gaze as if The Man stood above us, his one-eye like a sweeping

searchlight in our skulls, its beams shooting out of our eyes as we blast each other with luminous suspicion. Terrified, we wear a mask for Him and blindly build the wall.

On Election Day, the wall fell. Under the pressure of millions of people, chipping one vote at a time, it fell beneath our feet and we poured through.

Obama promised us this moment and we believed him because he was our hope for redemption. Since the first slave was bound to the first master, intimate exploitation was secured by a line of division. Each generation, each immigrant group was made to re-enforce that line, build it higher until it became a wall too large to bring down. When we went into the voting booth and pulled Obama’s name, we reached through the symbolic blackness layered on brown skin to the humanity of the man within.

When police cars with spinning red and blue lights nudged Harlem’s revelers onto the sidewalk, I hopped in a cab for Union Square. During the ride, I thought of earlier that morning, walking to a church near my home in Bed-Stuy, joining the line of people, seeing the warm joy in their faces. Older black folk, hobbling on canes, were led to the front. They went into the booth and came out smiling.

As the voting official looked for my

ANALYSIS

SCANDALICIOUS: Why political reporting feasts on drama and trivia

By ARUN GUPTA

During the 2008 election cycle, which dragged on for almost two years, every week seemed to bring a new scandal: Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Pastor John Hagee, \$400 haircuts, fist bumps, flag flaps, lipstick on a pig, ACORN, palling around with terrorists, \$150,000 wardrobes and many more.

Some were real, many were invented, but most were irrelevant. The scandals swamped nearly every other issue: the housing bust, global warming, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, White House lawlessness. At times they even eclipsed the global market meltdown.

The scandals persisted despite pundits decrying the intense coverage devoted to them and despite a survey a year before the election showing that 77 percent of voters wanted to hear more about the candidates’ positions on the issues.

Why, if journalists dismiss scandals as distractions and voters claim they want to hear more about the issues, does the corporate media latch onto each new scandal like a drunk clutching a bottle of Night Train?

Because of money. Scandals serve a critical function in the political economy of the corporate media: they are the “widgets” the mainstream news outlets produce to generate revenue and profits.

Every company has a widget, the product it manufactures. For ExxonMobil it’s

petroleum products; for Microsoft it’s software; and for the media outlets that drove election coverage — talk radio, websites and most of all, cable news channels — it’s scandals.

Scandals mean more viewers. More viewers result in better ratings. Better ratings mean higher ad rates, which brings in more money and hence more profit. And profit-making is the main purpose of the corporate media.

THE SCANDAL FORMULA

There is a basic formula. The scandal is introduced. If it gains viewers, then it gets more coverage. The news media devote hours to dissecting the “latest developments” in the scandal, as if some profound event occurred. They demand official responses, which generates new content, and further rounds of analysis. Then the media conduct polls about the scandal, which itself becomes a news item to draw in more viewers and revenue. And so on, until interest wanes and attention shifts to a new scandal.

One only needs to examine ratings and content of cable news programs to find the evidence. Ratings for the three main cable news stations boomed in 2008, whether compared to 2007 or the last presidential election in 2004. What network executives obsess over is the “25–54 demo,” that is, viewers between the ages of 25 and 54. These are the most important numbers as they are used to set advertising rates.

According to the Oct. 20 issue of *Media Week*, CNN saw a 69 percent jump in the 25–54 demo during prime time from March 31, 2008, to Oct. 15, 2008, compared to 2004. MSNBC had a whopping 146 percent increase in such viewers over 2004. Fox News, the category leader with an average of 500,000 viewers a night this year, recorded a drop of 9 percent from 2004. Media watchers expected Fox to take a hit this year because of the unfavorable climate for Republicans, but it increased its overall viewership by 21 percent in 2008, so it did well.

The difference is even larger compared to 2007. This year, from Oct. 17 to 23, MSNBC’s *Countdown with Keith Olberman* and Fox News’ *The O’Reilly Factor* ranged from half-a-million to a million viewers aged 25–54. The following week, Oct. 24–30, they both averaged more than a million viewers a night in the same demographic. For Fox, this is up to three times the number of viewers the network had during prime time in 2007, and for MSNBC the increase is nearly fivefold.

To build audiences and ratings, the media compete to be first with a story. To 24-hour mediums like cable news, the web and talk radio, scandals are a quick fix. Understanding the health-care crisis requires devoting time and attention to detailed analysis. It’s not that the broadcast media can’t do it, it’s that thoughtful debate on global warming or the Iraq War is not as likely to draw viewers as video of a preacher damning

America or the absurdity of a \$150,000 clothing budget. Loud, extreme positions, often coming from the right, grab the most attention. With so much competition for viewers, a media outlet can distinguish itself by catering to partisan leanings and broadcasting lurid reports.

McCain’s chief strategist, Steve Schmidt, who knows a little about hyping scandals, said a few days before the Nov. 4 election, “The news cycle is hyperaccelerated and driven by new players on the landscape, like Politico and Huffington Post. He explained because “there is a high premium on being first ... this hyperaccelerates a cable-news cycle driven to conflict and drama and trivia.”

This is not to say the media’s obsession over trivial issues is inevitable. Investigative reporting can grab market share, but it’s resource intensive and fares best in an informed political culture. However, the U.S. public is generally poorly educated about politics, history and economics, so many voters accept the canard that what matters more is “character” issues, which scandals play on, rather than issued-based reporting.

Last year, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press surveyed 48 media outlets and found that 86 percent of reports dealt with horse-race coverage like “fund-raising, tactics and polling.” Pew noted that as part of the media’s fixation on tactical questions, it watches for “misstatements and gaffes,” which is the essence of many

name, an older woman teased me, “Who you voting for.” I smiled and said “I’ve been waiting to vote for McCain since 2000.” We laughed knowingly. I asked her how she felt. Her face opened and eyes watered, “Oh honey, you don’t know how long I’ve waited to feel what I’m feeling right now.” We hugged, swaying back and forth like a bell ringing.

I voted, left the church and saw that the line went down the block and around the corner. Young men in bandannas, mothers sipping coffee, workers in hard-hats, hipsters nodding with I-pods were sharing the same sidewalk, the same goal, the same need to break the wall of color.

Four centuries, I thought, four centuries of slavery and terror and doubt. My eyes were hot and wet. I blinked and saw the cab had pulled up at Union Square.

Young people swirled in circles around the tuba players and drummers. Jumping out, I ran to them as they chanted “Yes we can!” Curious, I waited for the back-beat and yelled, “Stop the war!” The two chants went back and forth for a few minutes but no one took up my call.

I bought incense and walked to Tompkins Square Park, smoke curled behind me like a vanishing tail. Along St. Mark’s hundreds milled around. Some danced to

the Bob Marley anthems that poured out of an apartment window like a waterfall of music. Some waved the flag and sang “The Star-Spangled Banner.” Some kissed strangers. At the end of the street, police stood grim-faced with an unrolled orange net. We wanted the park. The cops gripped the orange net. The silent lightning of challenge flashed between us and police. We stood close. Eye friction then word sparks.

But a new chant rose, “Dance, cops, dance,” we yelled. “Dance, cops, dance!” They didn’t come over but we spun in our center of gravity and the police stood there, holding a net that only they were trapped in. In the morning, I stumbled home and slept in my clothes.

Days later I play my phone messages from election night to feel rapture again. In the last message from a friend, I can hear the crowd roaring behind her, “History. This is history, this is such an incredible moment, I am without words but I just wanted to share my joy and hope.”

I clicked off knowing her message will be erased automatically in a month. We can never go back to that night. It was a one-time event but hearing her reminded my body and I rubbed my chest, feeling the afterglow.

scandals, whether Obama’s comments about bitter voters, Palin’s disastrous interviews, McCain’s statements on the economy or pretty much anything that came out of Biden’s mouth.

FROM A TINY ACORN

The right-wing echo chamber serves a role as an incubator of scandals. There are so many powerful right-wing media outlets that they can fabricate scandals out of thin air, like “lipstick on a pig.” Republicans use the echo chamber to create a groundswell of outrage. Either the corporate media ignore the fabrication, which then is presented by the right as proof of liberal media bias, or the noise leaks into mainstream discourse, such as the fabricated ACORN voter-fraud charges.

None of this would be possible if the two parties actually talked about the issues. But they don’t want to since there was little difference between McCain and Obama on many issues. Both supported the Wall Street bailout and favored tax cuts and free-trade treaties. Both opposed universal health care and backed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Talking politics means talking about winners and losers. Obama and McCain could never admit their policies don’t benefit the poor, workers and middle class because they needed those voters. And they wouldn’t endorse policies of economic redistribution because they needed the rich and big corpo-

rations to fund their campaigns.

All that is left to discuss are issues of image – message discipline, character, stagecraft and most of all, branding. Modern politics is a creation of the advertising industry. The congressional and presidential races cost \$2.7 billion this cycle. Campaigns use money to create an emotional bond between voters and candidates through branding, packaging and marketing. This is why campaigns need scandals. They are a powerful weapon to demolish an opponent’s brand.

TEAM OBAMA

Obama’s team is more cautious and better disciplined than Clinton, whose presidency was mired in scandal before he even assumed office. But Obama did not change this system; he used it almost flawlessly to get elected.

Don’t be surprised if Obama is under assault before he takes office. The public now favors a stronger government role in the economy, thus it will be difficult for Republicans to oppose progressive policies on their merits. The right will try to use scandals to sap Obama’s political capital. If any scandal gains traction, the broadcast media will join the mob. Everyone gets what they want: The Republicans get to reclaim some power while the news media get to reclaim viewers. The only losers are the public. So, despite all the talk about change, it’s still a long time coming.



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- DEC 6 10:00 AM-4 PM** Introduction to Marxism with Vivek Chibber
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CHANGE WE CAN REALLY BELIEVE IN

Barack Obama has inspired millions to believe that change is possible. But, what kind of change? And to whose benefit? Our country and our world are in crisis, and the tepid, incremental reforms Obama has been peddling aren't going to cut it. It's time to think outside the box.

By JOHN TARLETON

HEALTH CARE

OBAMA'S PLAN: Provide subsidies and tax credits so people can afford insurance from the private sector or from a new public plan. The government, like some employers do now, would pay a portion of the premium. Obama wants to fund it by repealing the Bush tax cuts for those making more than \$250,000 annually. Large employers that don't offer "meaningful" coverage to employees would be penalized, with the funds going to subsidize individual insurance policies. The plan would require insurance companies to accept everyone, regardless of pre-existing medical conditions. Additionally, Obama's plan would try to reduce administrative costs and establish mandatory universal children's healthcare.

PITFALLS: Even with subsidies, many people will be unable to afford healthcare coverage. "Meaningful" coverage is poorly defined, and insurance companies would fiercely resist requirements to accept all customers because it would cut into their profits. Obama is trying to reduce costs without confronting the for-profit model, which is the primary factor in spiraling healthcare costs.

WHAT WE NEED: Medicare for all! Established in the 1960s, this single-payer program provides affordable medical coverage for all of the United States' 40 million senior citizens and has far less overhead than private insurance programs. Taxes would have to be increased to bring everyone into Medicare, but most people's healthcare costs would go down while the quality of care would increase. Complex schemes, such as Obama's, are engineered to allow insurance and pharmaceutical companies to keep sucking up vast profits.

TAKING ACTION: Healthcare Now!, a coalition of dozens of progressive groups with chapters in over 300 cities, is the main force behind H.R. 676, which would establish a universal, single payer healthcare system. H.R. 676 currently has 90 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives. For more, go to healthcare-now.org

THE ECONOMY

OBAMA'S PLAN: Obama supports an estimated \$100 billion economic stimulus package that would provide more spending on public works, unemployment insurance and food stamps, and he vows to restore top marginal tax rates from 35 to 39 percent. As for Obama's promised \$1,000 middle class tax cut, it appears he is planning to defer that initiative in the face of spiraling budget deficits.

As for the bailout, Obama supports it and appears likely to appoint Timothy Geithner, President of the New York Federal Reserve Bank, as Secretary of the Treasury. Geithner brokered JP Morgan Chase's takeover of Bear Stearns last March in which the Fed ended up mainly getting worthless subprime mortgage securities in return as collateral for the nearly \$30 billion it put up.

WHAT WE NEED: Restructuring not reform. Any attempts at re-regulation will be watered down by intensive lobbying from the financial sector, and any legislation that passes will find its enforcement hindered by the same forces. Instead, nationalize the commercial banking sector. If any bank or insurance company is too big to fail, take them over. Same goes with

any corporation seeking a bailout, such as the auto sector. If they are failing, are too important to let die and need public funds, then the public should own them. Top executives of these firms should be fired and replaced with managers charged to work in the public interest.

Abolish the Federal Reserve and create a central bank that is open, transparent and accountable to the public, not the current one, which is a secret club for private banks. Ban all trading in derivatives, which are financial products based on an underlying asset. (They are like a side bet on a baseball game, such as gambling on how many strikeouts a pitcher will record.)

Only allow futures trading for producers and consumers of commodities, such as farmers that grow grains or airlines that use fuel.

Use progressive taxation to redistribute income to the poor and middle classes. To deal with the economic crisis, address the stagnant wages of the last 35 years by raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations, and making the organizing climate easier for unions, all of which will lead to rising incomes.

TAKING ACTION: For grassroots organizing and strategizing, go to bailoutmainstreet.com.

GET INVOLVED

Feeling inspired by the election but not sure what to do next? You can change the world right here in your own city. Go to TheIndependent.org's community activism page at www.indypendent.org/resources and check out scores of grassroots groups working on a wide array of issues. If you have a group for us to add, call 212-221-0521 or email contact@indypendent.org.

IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN WARS

OBAMA'S PLAN: Obama has called for a phased withdrawal of all U.S. combat brigades in the first 16 months of his administration – if conditions are deemed favorable. However, Obama would still maintain a "residual force" in Iraq to engage in "counterterrorism" efforts against insurgents, protect U.S. diplomatic and civilian personnel, and train and support Iraqi security forces. He has been silent about withdrawing the 140,000 mercenaries that support the occupation. Author and Independent contributor Jeremy Scahill argues that Obama's withdrawal plan could leave as many as 60,000 U.S. troops in Iraq alongside a similar number of mercenaries.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and much of Iraq's infrastructure remains in shambles. Also, the United States has pursued a divide-and-rule strategy that has pitted Iraq's various ethnic and religious communities against each other.

Under Obama's plan, Afghanistan would become the "central front in the war on terror" and combat troops freed up from Iraq would be re-deployed there. The Afghanistan war has spread into Pakistan, however, pitting Pakistani troops against a homegrown guerrilla force sometimes called the Pakistani Taliban. Obama has indicated he would continue the Bush administration tactics of unilateral U.S. attacks within Pakistan, which are further destabilizing the region.

WHAT WE NEED: In-

stead of rebranding the occupation, Obama should pursue a rapid and complete withdrawal from Iraq. In its negotiations with the Bush administration on a Status of Forces agreement, Iraq's government has insisted that all U.S. troops should leave the country by the end of 2011, but it is likely to leave loopholes so forces can continue past that date. Why wait for the door to bump us on the ass?

Let the Iraqis take charge of their country and oil reserves, and let them address the sectarian schisms, which have been stoked by the United States. If we want to help, we can do so by paying reparations for launching an illegal and immoral war.

In Afghanistan, the U.S.-led reconstruction is in ruins after seven years and the insurgency has intensified as the number of international troops has grown from 40,000 to 70,000 over the past two years. Obama should con-

vene multi-party peace talks that include the Taliban as the first step toward a full U.S. withdrawal. To address the root causes of the conflict, the United States should fund the development of locally oriented economies, instead of pushing export-based industries as a solution.

Finally, cut all military, security and intelligence spending by at least 25 percent by the end of first term.

TAKING ACTION: Iraq Veterans Against the War has emerged as the moral center of the antiwar movement. To find out how you can help support them, see iwar.org ... Look for groups like Code Pink (codepink4peace.org) to raise a ruckus in the spring when Congress prepares to sign off on another \$150 billion or so to finance the two wars for another year.

GREEN DEAL/RENEWABLE ENERGY

OBAMA'S PLAN: He has vowed to create 5 million new jobs by pursuing a "Green Deal," such as by investing \$150 billion over 10 years in alternative energy. He's also promised to have 1 million plug-in hybrid cars on the road by 2015 and to have 25 percent of U.S. electricity come from renewable sources by 2025.

WHAT WE NEED: Obama's call to ramp up investment in wind and solar is a start, and the money saved by winding down two wars and cutting military spending will go a long way toward funding such initiatives. However, scrap plans for subsidizing "clean coal", biofuels and a new generation of nuclear power plants. Viable carbon sequestration technologies don't exist. Using food for fuel exacerbates rising food prices and world hunger. Nuclear power is neither safe nor

cost-effective.

Eighty percent of Americans live in metropolitan areas and a wide array of urban sustainability initiatives should be launched from funding more mass transit and bicycling to promoting urban farming and more public green space and reversing sprawl in favor of shifting people into cities, which can be much less resource intensive than suburbs or rural areas. Carbon emissions should be heavily taxed as a step towards mitigating global warming. Ditch cap-and-trade schemes, which are rife with fraud and may turn into the next speculative bubble as financial firms have already opened up carbon-trading desks in anticipation of the huge profits that can be made.

TAKING ACTION: For more on efforts to develop a "Green Deal", go to apolloalliance.org, bluegreenalliance.org or greenforall.org. For more radical environmental activism see risingtidenorthamerica.org or earthfirst.org. To learn more about the struggle against "clean coal", go to mountainjusticesummer.org.

More enforcement-driven immigration means politically-connected private prison companies like Correction Corporations of America will continue to reap enormous profits from warehousing detainees.

WHAT WE NEED: Stop workplace raids and mass deportations by the Department of Homeland Security that are terrorizing whole immigrant communities. Guarantee immigrant workers the same rights as citizens. It's the only way to prevent employers from pitting one group of workers against another and to the detriment of all. A guest worker program would create a two-tier labor system. End support for unjust trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free

Trade Agreement (CAFTA) that have driven more than a million small farmers off their lands and sent them migrating north. In the face of widespread immigrant bashing, what we may need first is for President Obama to lead a national discussion about how immigrants make the United States a more dynamic, culturally diverse and prosperous society.

TAKING ACTION: Local groups on the forefront of immigrants rights struggles in New York include Families for Freedom (families-forfreedom.org) and New Immigrant Community Empowerment (nynice.org). Nationally, two groups to check out are the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (nnirr.org) and the National Immigration Law Center (nilc.org).

“ELECTION DAY WILL NOT BE ENOUGH”

An Interview with Howard Zinn

BY JESSICA LEE AND JOHN TARLETON

The election of President-elect Barack Obama is a historic moment pinned between an energizing rhetoric and a dire reality. To help put the occasion in perspective, *The Indy* reached out to renowned U.S. historian Howard Zinn, author of *A People’s History of the United States*.

The Indy independent: Since its inception, the United States has experienced vast social changes that are often oversimplified in history books as the projects of politicians and the product of presidents. How does change actually occur and what can be learned from these collective moments in history?

Howard Zinn: Significant changes occur when social movements reach a critical point of power capable of moving cautious politicians beyond their tendency to keep things as they are — or when these movements, by direct action, bypass the political system and bring about change by acting directly on the obstacles to change. When the anti-slavery movement reached its height in the late 1850s and early 1860s, it pushed President Abraham Lincoln toward the Emancipation Proclamation and pushed Congress toward the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. When the labor movement became militant and called strikes all over the country in the 1880s, it won the eight-hour day directly from employers without the actions of government. In the 1930s, the strike and the growing labor movement pushed President Franklin D. Roosevelt into the New Deal reforms — minimum wage, Social Security, subsidized housing, etc. When black people protested and demonstrated all over the South, bringing about scenes that shocked the nation, then we got the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But before that legislation, militant black protesters desegregated lunch counters and began to change the South by direct action. The movement against the war in Vietnam reached the point where it could not be ignored, where the direct action of

deserting GIs, angry veterans and draft resisters created an atmosphere in which the government could no longer count on the support of the American people — and then the government began to move gradually toward ending the war.

The Indy: Obama has inspired a “hope” and energy among millions of people that has not been seen in decades. Do you believe this grassroots activity is actually a sign of a growing social movement? Have grassroots movements centered around electoral processes resulted in large-scale change in the past?

HZ: The new energy and enthusiasm have the potential of a new movement, but if they stop on Election Day that will not be enough. Too often the diversion of energy into electoral campaigns saps the movement’s energy. This happened in 1896 when the Populist movement supported the Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, and when he lost, the movement fell apart. Even if he had won, the movement would have had to sustain its momentum for a Bryan administration to bring about change.

The Indy: What will Obama need to do to ensure that his presidency results in transformational change?

HZ: Withdraw troops from Iraq and Afghanistan as fast as ships and planes can carry them home, declare that the United States will not engage in aggressive wars, renounce the Bush doctrine of preventive war and the Carter doctrine, which threatens force to control Mideast oil, and start dismantling our military bases overseas. He should announce that we are henceforth a peace-loving nation, no longer a target for terrorists and no longer engaging in terrorism ourselves. He should reduce the military establishment and the military budget down to a bare minimum and create a jobs program for young people instead of recruiting them for military service.

The Indy: How should Obama fundamentally address the economic crisis?

HZ: We have a historic and successful precedent. The government in the early days of the New Deal put millions of people to work rebuilding the nation’s infrastructure. Hundreds of thousands of young people, instead of joining the army to escape poverty, joined the Civil Conservation Corps, which built bridges and highways, cleaned up harbors and rivers. Thousands of artists, musicians and writers were employed by the WPA’s arts programs to paint murals, produce plays, write symphonies. The New Deal (defying the cries of “socialism”) established Social Security, which, along with the GI Bill, became a model for what government could do to help its people. This is a golden opportunity for Obama to distance himself cleanly from the fossilized Democratic Party leaders, giving life to his slogan of change. And if he doesn’t act, it will be up to the people, as it always has been, to raise a shout that will be heard around the world — and compel the politicians to listen.



Howard Zinn.
PHOTO: HARVARD SQ. LIBRARY



LIFE OF THE PARTY: Kartika Liotard of the Dutch Socialist Party. PHOTO: SMOOZ.4YOUR.NET

Change from Below

BY ARON GUY

Three days before the presidential election, Dutch Socialist Party member of the European Parliament Kartika Liotard met with the New York City chapter of the Socialist Party USA at the A.J. Muste Institute in lower Manhattan to share her experience of building a widespread grassroots movement.

“People were looking for something different,” said Liotard, who has spent 21 years helping to create a party that is strong on the streets and a winner at the ballot box.

In a small country of 16.5 million people without a substantial left-wing tradition, the Dutch Socialist Party (SP) has more than 60,000 members and is the third-largest and fastest-growing of the Netherlands’ ten parliamentary parties.

Founded in 1972, the SP holds 25 of 150 seats in the Netherlands lower house of parliament, which allocates seats based on the proportion of the popular vote. This is the equivalent of holding about 72 seats in the 435-member U.S. House of Representatives, although the U.S. system of winner-take-all voting would make this much more difficult to achieve. Liotard is one of 27 members of her party elected to represent the Netherlands in the 785-member European Parliament.

Liotard explained that the Dutch SP achieved success by creating an egalitarian socialist movement, built on the experience and practice of its members. Guided by three core concepts of human dignity, equality and solidarity, the party rejected the notion of a top-down socialist movement and insisted on full representation of members’ interests and needs.

“We knew we had to create a new kind of modern socialism,” Liotard said.

The SP is dedicated to the principles of a generous social welfare state and public ownership of key sectors of the economy. In the short-term, its members are working to alleviate the more egregious harms of the capitalist state. At the beginning, two or three SP members would travel to a neighborhood and listen to community concerns. Was there too much garbage on

the street? Not enough lights on at night? No facilities for the elderly? Once the needs were identified, the SP would help to organize local people to solve those problems. The SP also cooperated with trade unions, helping during strikes and working to reform labor law.

This strategy eventually led to the election of socialist members at the local and regional level, and by 1996, the SP had its first national representatives in the parliament. The SP began to be identified as the party of the working class, in part by people who felt the older and larger Labor Party no longer represented them. As the SP became more successful, the party made an important decision. SP members in all levels of office would draw an average salary, with any excess money returned to the party. This would give the party more financial resources to address issues of concern to their members.

For example, Liotard said the Dutch SP is leading the way in outlawing the use of asbestos and helping the victims of asbestos-related illnesses — a campaign supported in part by the salaries of SP-elected politicians.

Other sources of funding come from the sliding-scale dues paid to the party by its members. In addition, people donate their time, which means a little money can go a relatively long way.

With success, the SP increased its focus on maintaining a close, transparent relationship with people at the grassroots level. As the largest opposition party in parliament, the SP had a chance to join in the ruling coalition with Christian Democrats and the Labor Party after the 2006 elections, but ultimately decided that the level of compromise was too high.

The “secret,” then, of a dynamic socialist movement turns out to be not so secret after all: intense, local, highly adaptive community organizing done by hard-working people who did not let their small numbers or their failures deter them at first and who so far have not let their growth or electoral success take them away from their base.

Liotard ended her discussion with a grand prediction. “I’ll come back next year and we will be in a huge hall,” she said.

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Gazans resist by surviving

“I will send fire upon the walls of Gaza...”
—Amos 1:7

BY RAMZI KYSIA

GAZA STRIP, PALESTINE — In a small cafe in Gaza City, Amjad Shawa, the coordinator for the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), sips black coffee and ruminates on the Israeli blockade of Gaza. “This siege isn’t about ‘security’ or even about Hamas,” he says. “Israel’s ultimate aim is to separate Gaza from the West Bank and kill the Palestinian national project.”

The Gaza Strip, a 25-mile-long narrow coastal plain wedged between Israel and Egypt, is home to 1.5 million Palestinians. Despite its small size, Gaza in many ways encapsulates the essence of two of the world’s major conflicts: the rise of political Islam and the use by the West of collective punishment and economic coercion as a brutal counterweight.

Since Hamas won parliamentary elections in January 2006, Israel has subjected Gaza to an increasingly severe blockade. In June 2007, after Hamas defeated militants aligned with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and forcibly asserted control of Gaza, Israel tightened the blockade to include everything except occasional deliveries of humanitarian goods. The local economy has shattered as a result, leading to steep increases in unemployment, poverty and

childhood malnutrition rates.

While Abbas and the Fatah party still govern the West Bank with Israel’s full support, Hamas faces an uncertain future. Although Gazans have rallied around the government, there is also increasing public frustration with the moribund economy.

Rawya Shawa, an independent member of the Palestinian Legislative Council from Gaza, describes Palestine as being in political limbo. “When you’re in power it’s never the same as when you’re on the outside,” Shawa says. “Seventy percent of Gaza are refugees. Fatah led the Palestinians for 45, 50 years. Fatah failed. They didn’t deliver anything. Hamas, now, they are trying. They didn’t succeed yet, so people are still just waiting.”

THE RISE OF HAMAS

Confronting the decline of pan-Arab nationalism which had peaked during the 1960s and ’70s and the collapse of the 1993 Oslo Accords, Hamas found fertile ground in Palestine by combining social welfare projects, religious traditionalism, anti-elitism (Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh still lives in the house where he grew up in Beach Camp, one of Gaza’s poorest neighborhoods) and a hard-line stance toward Israel. Although Hamas is currently observing a unilateral ceasefire, in the past its military wing has sent small rockets and suicide bombers into Israel, leading to its designation as a terrorist group by Israel and the United States.



GAZA’S AGONY: Jabar Abujila and his daughters stand in front of their ruined farm in the Al-Farheen neighborhood on the border between Gaza and Israel. Israeli soldiers bulldozed the 12 acre Abujila family farm five months ago, destroying all of the crops. PHOTO: RAMZI KYSIA

Few Gazans agree with that description. According to B’Tselem, an Israeli human rights group, 955 Palestinian minors have been killed by Israeli security forces, while 123 Israeli minors have been killed in Palestinian attacks since the start of the second intifada in September 2000. With the blockade, 3,500 out of 3,900 factories in Gaza have closed, leading to over 100,000 private sector layoffs. Per capita income in Gaza is less than two dollars a day, and 80 percent of families are completely dependent on international food aid.

The siege has led to massive shortages that have rippled through the economy and society. Shortages in fuel caused gasoline prices to spiral to \$50 a gallon in early summer, leading to sustained power cuts. Hospitals, dependent on diesel-powered generators, regularly lost power for up to 12 hours a day. Unable to operate irrigation pumps, farmers experienced significant loss of crops. Most family homes have running water for less than six hours a day, and almost a third of homes have no running water.

Without electricity, sewage treatment facilities are unable to work, and raw sewage is being dumped into the Mediterranean — turning the sea into a toilet. Over 15 billion liters of raw sewage has been released into the Mediterranean in 2008 alone, killing much of the marine life in the immediate vicinity.

Compared to December 2005, less than 20 percent of the supplies needed for normal trade are allowed into Gaza by Israel, and foreign investment has fallen off by over 95 percent, leading both the World Bank and some Israeli human rights organizations to call for an end to the siege.

“This is not a natural disaster,” says John Ging, director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency in Gaza. “It is a man-made disaster created by policies that are not humane.”

DIRECT ACTION

The people of Gaza aren’t waiting for the siege to end to deal with the crisis. In January, hundreds of thousands of Gazans poured into Egypt when Hamas demolished a border wall that Israel had erected in 2003. In February, the Popular Committee Against the Siege organized thousands of Gazans

into a “human chain” that stretched along the entire length of the Gaza Strip.

“My phone was ringing off the hook all day because they [the Israelis] thought we were going to storm the border,” says Sameh Habeeb, one of the event organizers. “Israel couldn’t believe that thousands of Arabs could peacefully protest. When there’s armed resistance Israel can send their rockets and F-16s, but they don’t know how to respond to civil resistance. Nonviolence makes the Israelis crazy.”

The greatest act of nonviolent resistance in Gaza has been simply surviving. Some families have taken to catching and raising wild rabbits and birds to supplement their diet. A network of perilous tunnels that cross into Egypt has claimed several lives, but has also helped to relieve shortages with smuggled goods. In recent weeks, an underground pipeline for gasoline has substantially eased the fuel crisis. Automobile conversion kits, allowing cars to run off cooking gas, sell for about \$300. Shortages in propane have led families to revert to wood-burning stoves for cooking and, with the scarcity of concrete, Gazans have returned to using earthen bricks for construction.

The collapse of Gaza’s economy is an example of imperialism at its most extreme: prevent raw materials from entering the economy, weaken and tear down native industries through military violence and blockade, allow access only to finished products imported from the outside (in this case, Israeli products) and force the local population and its uncooperative government to expend and exhaust whatever resources and reserves they had managed to set aside. When the Gaza blockade is finally lifted, people here will be hard pressed to recover, even with increased humanitarian assistance.

PNGO Director Amjad Shawa points out that the blockade is part and parcel of the ongoing Israeli occupation. “Gaza is still occupied, legally and physically,” says Shawa, “and the siege is simply one part of this aggression. We don’t need more aid. What we need is an end to the occupation.”

Ramzi Kysia is an Arab-American writer and activist, and one of the organizers of the Free Gaza Movement. To find out more, visit www.FreeGaza.org.

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PROPAGANDA WAR

Magic Laptops hit FARC, Chavez

By DANIEL DENVIR

Since the Colombian government bombed a guerrilla camp on Ecuadoran soil March 1, it has orchestrated a highly effective media campaign backed by material allegedly found on laptops and hard drives belonging to a high-ranking member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the largest rebel group in Latin America. The laptops were used almost immediately after the raid to implicate both the Ecuadoran and Venezuelan governments in drug-trafficking and “terrorist” connections to the FARC. Colombia’s media campaign has been based on dubious evidence at best, and many charge that the “magic laptops” are being used to deflect criticism of Colombia’s violation of Ecuadoran sovereignty, distract the public from a domestic political scandal and justify the government’s policy of total war against the FARC.

In September, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced that it was designating one former and two current high-ranking Venezuelan government officials as collaborators with FARC. These assertions came a day after Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez announced that he was expelling the U.S. ambassador in solidarity with Bolivia’s Evo Morales, who had done the same a day earlier. While OFAC did not specify its

sources, an anonymous Bush administration official told *The New York Times* that the allegations were partly based on evidence from laptops recovered from a FARC camp in Ecuadoran territory bombed and raided by the Colombian military on March 1.

These “magic laptops,” which seem to supply evidence of FARC collaboration at an opportune moment for the Colombian and U.S. governments, have formed the centerpiece of a propaganda campaign launched by the Colombian government and security forces, abetted by the media in Colombia, the United States, and Spain.

This campaign uses a well-established technique: Allegations of FARC ties have long been used in Colombia to defame human rights activists and dissident politicians, often leading to death threats or assassinations by the army or paramilitary forces. The laptop-based allegations have been made through press conferences and intelligence leaks, as new charges have been rolled out to counter Ecuador’s consistent diplomatic victories at the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international bodies. It has also served to distract attention at home from a growing scandal connecting Colombia’s President Alvaro Uribe’s administration to narco-paramilitaries.

The most serious accusation made against



the Venezuelan government was that it had promised the FARC a \$300 million payment or loan and that Chávez had maintained a financial relationship with the FARC since 1992. It was first reported as a payment that had already been made, perhaps in exchange for the FARC’s February hostage release mediated by Chávez. But on March 30, *The New York Times*, relying on information leaked by the Colombian government, claimed that there was evidence of a \$250 million loan “to be paid when we take power.” Mirroring Ecuador’s appeal to international law, Colombia announced that it would take its charges of FARC ties to the OAS, and Uribe threatened to bring charges against Chávez before the UN International Criminal Court for “aiding genocide.”

Media outlets, particularly in Colombia, the United States, and Spain, have been

complicit in the Colombian propaganda campaign, embedding themselves in a perceived fight against the FARC and its supposed allies in the Ecuadoran and Venezuelan governments. As an unnamed U.S. intelligence official told the *Los Angeles Times* in March: “I think you have to take at face value what the Colombians are saying.” The mainstream media have done just that—particularly in Colombia.

Uribe’s “War on Terror,” and that of his allies, shows no signs of letting up, and the use of unverified electronic evidence to prosecute that war seems likely to continue.

Daniel Denvir is an independent journalist based in Ecuador. For a detailed analysis of media complicity in the Colombian propaganda campaign see nacla.org, where the full version of this article was originally published.



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CULTURE

A Threat to Justice Everywhere

CHANEY, GOODMAN, SCHWERNER MURDERS HAUNT FILMMAKERS

NESHOBA
DIRECTED BY MICKI DICKOFF AND TONY PAGANO
PRO BONO AND PAGANO, 2008

Emmy-winning filmmaker Micki Dickoff was 17 in 1964, the year Freedom Summer sent people south to register African-American voters. “I wanted to go but my father wouldn’t let me,” Dickoff told a packed audience at the New York premiere of *NESHOBA*, a gripping 90-minute documentary about the murders of civil rights activists James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Neshoba County, Mississippi. “When the three boys were killed, it haunted me.”

Years later, Dickoff was still thinking about the incident. Specifically, she wondered if Neshoba County had come to terms with its racist past, or if the area remained as racially segregated as it had been during the first half of the 20th century. She teamed up with award-winning filmmaker Tony Pagano, and the pair spent four and a half years

probing for answers, along the way interviewing Mississippians of all political leanings and backgrounds.

The result, *NESHOBA*, culminates in the 2005 trial of Rev. Edgar Lee Killen, an unrepentant white racist believed to be the mastermind behind the activists’ murders.

The film provides a detailed history of Neshoba County and residents’ reactions to shifts in racial attitudes. At the same time, it addresses how local police and the Ku Klux Klan worked in tandem with the FBI and Department of Justice to preserve the white-dominated status quo in the murders’ aftermath. Dick Molpus, a civil rights activist, sums it up: “For 40 years our state judicial system has allowed murderers to roam our land.”

Key leaders in 1960s politics — from Mississippi Senator James Eastland, the pro-segregation chair of the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, to the state’s overtly racist governor, Ross Barnett, to local civil rights champions — are introduced using archival footage. In addition, recent interviews with

surviving members of the Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner families offer compelling insights about their kin, humanizing them and fueling our understanding of their commitment to equality. Chaney, we’re told, was a 20-year-old Mississippi native who’d joined with New Yorkers Schwerner, a married, 24-year-old social worker, and Goodman, a 20-year-old college student who had not previously been involved in politics. The trio was killed en route to the recently burned Mt. Zion Church in Longdale, Miss.

The voices of countless Neshoba natives add to the mix, exemplifying both racial progress and resistance to integration. Some, like Deborah Posey and Jewel McDonald, one white, one Black, are members of the Philadelphia Coalition, a multiracial organization seeking racial reconciliation. *NESHOBA* chronicles the coalition’s push to uncover what really happened to Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner — organizing that led the county district attorney and Mississippi attorney general to re-investigate and finally charge Killen.

Dickoff and Pagano spent

months interviewing Killen, both before and after his 2005 conviction on three counts of manslaughter. “When he was indicted he gave four interviews, including us,” Pagano says. “We later went back and said we wanted to tell his story. We tried very hard not to demonize him. He paints his own picture.”

Indeed. While Killen comes across as an old-school bigot who makes repeated quips about commie-Jewish-Christ killers, the film nonetheless presents him as a scapegoat. The point is simple: Killen did not act alone. Justice, Pagano and Dickoff argue, demands that all involved have their day in court.

What’s more, Dickoff believes that justice requires a reckoning with racism’s legacy. As she said at the premiere, “With a Black man running for President — unthinkable 40 years ago — our film serves as a reminder of how far we’ve come in race relations and how far we need to go.”

—ELEANOR J. BADER

For information about showing the film, email neshobafilm@yahoo.com or ProBono3@aol.com.

Civil Conversations

How Shall I Live My Life?: On Liberating The Earth From Civilization
BY DERRICK JENSEN
PM PRESS, 2008.



Derrick Jensen’s 2006 epic *Endgame* was a rambling but provocative dissection of the environmental and political ills of civilization. Surveying the damage wrought by civilization, from dammed rivers to genocide, Jensen presented his solution: in order to save the planet, committed activists should work to bring down civilization in its entirety by “any means necessary.”

Many readers who consider themselves politically radical may find Jensen’s conclusion both dangerous and preposterous, yet Jensen has an avid army of fans who pack auditoriums to hear him speak and a popular but closely guarded internet forum.

However, even these fans may find themselves slightly disappointed by Jensen’s latest book, *How Shall I Live My Life?: On Liberating the Earth from Civilization*, which consists of previously published interviews conducted by Jensen between 1999 and 2001. The time lag between the interviews and the book’s publication can make the collection seem out of date. In an interview with the anti-car activist Jan Lundberg, much time is devoted to the topic of peak oil, yet we learn nothing new about our current energy crisis and oil prices that have oscillated wildly in the last few months.

But despite the lag, there are ideas of lasting value in *How Shall I Live My Life*, even for those who reject Jensen’s all-or-nothing approach to civilization. The book presents an appealing diversity of voices, each articulating a different vision of environmental activism. The interviewees include Thomas Berry, an environmental activist and Catholic monk; Jesse Wolf Hardin, the founder of the radical group Earth First!; Vine Deloria, the late American-Indian activist and writer; and Carolyn Raffensperger, a lawyer who campaigns against corporate abuse of public safety.

One of the most engaging interviews is with Kathleen Dean Moore, a philosopher based at Oregon State University. Moore passionately argues against mechanical and abstract thinking in favor of a deeper connection with place. “What I am recommending,” she says, “is a way of life that is rich with noticing. Caring. Remembering. Embracing. Rejoicing in ... the smell of a child’s hair, or the color of storm light.” This and other interviews serve as useful introductions to the work of less-known environmental thinkers.

This book may also appeal to readers who are put off by the hubris of the anti-civilization movement, of which Jensen is a leading figure. Jensen’s *Endgame* may be a radical manifesto, but its vision of small groups of committed foot-soldiers working to bring about a natural utopia is also strangely old-fashioned. *Endgame*’s emphasis on revolution and vanguards seems out of touch with the democratic spirit of recent anti-capitalist and environmental activism. The diversity of *How Shall I Live My Life*, on the other hand, seems more in tune with this activism. Despite a subtitle of *Liberating Earth from Civilization*, most of the interviewees do not seem interested in a tactically impossible struggle against a supposedly monolithic civilization. Instead, they promote diverse paths toward a deep connection to place and nature — a connection that could lay the basis for significant social transformation.

—HARRY THORNE

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The Macktivist

BY R. ALVAREZ

HEY MACKTIVIST:

Do you think it's necessary to define your sexuality? I like being crazysexycool with the ladies, but I don't think I could fall in love with a woman the way I could with a man. It's hard because lesbians think someone like me is just doing it for guys, or to seem cool or different. Guys think pretty much the same thing and someone with my tendencies is not well received in the LGBT community. As long as the people involved know the deal — can't I do whatever I want?

—SEXY IN SAN DIEGO

HI THERE SISD—

I proudly stand with the fluorescent flag that reads “Fluid Sexuality For All!” Who and what people are attracted to is both chemical and cultural — which is to say, the fixed part of who you are may naturally be drawn to some sexual exploits, but the impressionable and ever-learning part can change according to what wonderful options are presented to you. The more open we are about our potential desires — as opposed to resistant because of our current desires — the more we figure out what we're into.

So you're not getting love from the lesbian community, and I can't say that I'm surprised. Anti-bi sentiments are sadly

entrenched in both the straight and gay communities. During the feminist movement in the seventies, some women chose to be queer as a political statement, and since then, every decade has seen its rash of queer-passing for the sake of fashion. This often meant that those experimenting or simply having fun got the Salem BBQ treatment from some queers who had no choice but to live a marginalized lifestyle. To add insult to injury, queer ladies are working against a male-prescribed hetero-normative history that says they stick with gay until they come across the right cock — or the right cock comes across them.

In defense of bi-acting Johns and Janes everywhere, I would remind people that in the heat of the moment, the offending individual is not concerned with how their lapping is going to affect the queer political landscape; they're thinking “goodie goodie gumdrops!” — and that is a valid and queer enough reaction! We must stop seeing people who get down with both sexes as “less gay” and “less straight” than ourselves.

Because you don't really connect with an identity of queerness, perhaps what you are connecting with is an identity of kinky openness. (Heed Dr. Kinsey, who said that most people fluctuate between heterosexual and

homosexual — 0 to 6 on his famous scale.) You needn't participate in the next dyke march to show solidarity (though that wouldn't hurt), but it is each person's sexual civic duty to DTK — Defend That Kink!

How? Easy: Stop being ashamed. When a conversation with a friend takes a lascivious turn, take it as a chance to calmly represent what you like. This ground-level sex activism allows for people to have conversations they wouldn't normally have. Bonus: when you come clean about your perversion of choice, your friend's kinky inclinations may come slinking out of the shadows.

And while you're telling the whole world about your predilections, you may as well let your lovers in on the secret. Practice out loud what you would like to say to someone who is nonjudgmental and then say it expecting the best from other people. Leaving room for people to be gallant and understanding puts the impetus on them to act that way.

If the act of labeling yourself is the problem, then you can simply tell potential partners, “I prefer not to identify with any sexuality, but if we can get beyond that, I can assure you we're going to have a wonderful filthy fuck.” And what self-respecting pervert could say no to that?

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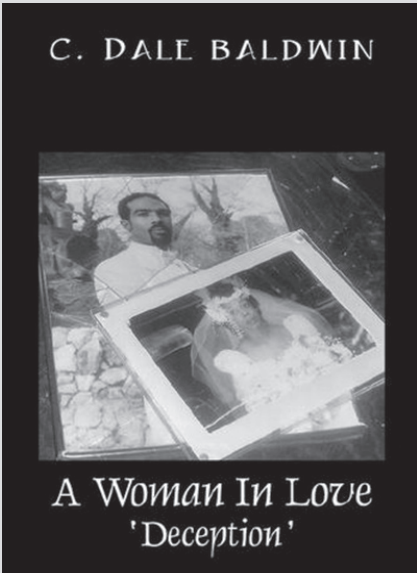
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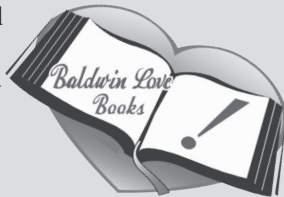
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